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Investigating al-Alwani's Hermeneutical Approach to the Renewal of Tafsīr Discourse: A Study based on Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān (Interpreting the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān)

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Abstract

This research investigates the hermeneutical method of Dr. Taha Jabir Al-Alwani as presented in the book *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* (Interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān), emphasizing its importance as a methodological innovation and a reformist contribution in the field of contemporary Qur'ānic studies. It discusses the author's principle of interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān and how this is consistently reflected in his major works. This study systematically interrogates al-Alwani's broader corpus in *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and contemporary Islamic thought, while privileging his magnum opus, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, as the primary focus of his hermeneutical paradigm. The study discusses his Qur'ān-centric approach, which emphasizes the internal coherence of the Qur'ān and the intertextual relations within Qur'ān, while limiting reliance on extra-Qur'ānic sources such as weak ḥadīth or unauthenticated narrations. It addresses the central research question of how this method overcomes certain limitations of traditional exegesis and builds a coherent interpretive model that is sensitive to contemporary intellectual and social challenges. The results indicate that al-Alwanis approach functions on two levels: the textual level, which focuses on the internal thematic cohesion of the Qurān, and the contextual level that relates the meanings of the Qurān to the contemporary challenges of human beings and social realities. He pays special attention to concepts such as *tazkiyah*, *tawhīd* and *mizān* – self-purification, oneness of God and balance - which he presents as primary themes of the Qur'ān. Thus, his paradigm functions both as an exegetical methodology and an epistemological model that seeks to restore Qur'ān as the principal source and normative standard of Islamic knowledge.

Keywords: Al-Alwani, Hermeneutics, Tafsīr, Qur'ānic Interpretation, Qur'ān-centered methodology

Introduction

The Qur'ān, as the primary source of Islamic guidance, conveys a universal message designed to guide humanity towards righteousness and spiritual fulfilment through all historical and social contexts. Since its revelation, it has been interpreted in response to the changing intellectual, legal and cultural realities of Muslim societies. This ongoing interpretive engagement demonstrates the semantic aspect of the Qur'ānic text and the need for methodological flexibility in Qur'ānic exegesis (Tafsīr). Qur'ānic exegesis originated with the Prophet Muhammad; he provided the essential explanations of revelation, followed by his Companions and their successors. Over time, Tafsīr

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developed into a systematic discipline with various methodological orientations such as linguistic, juristic, theological, mystical and socio scientific approaches.

This methodological pluralism illustrates the interpretive elasticity of the Qur'ānic text and at the same time exposes deep-rooted epistemological contestations over interpretive authority.¹

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly engaged with reformist approaches to Qur'ānic interpretation. Albayrak (2022)² examines the impact of modernity on Qur'ānic re-readings but focuses more on historical-intellectual trends than on internal textual methodologies. Sumantri (2013)³, emphasizes contextual reconstruction through Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory, but does not give priority to the intra-textual coherence. Hassan (2013)⁴ makes an important contribution to minority jurisprudence, although his focus is primarily legal rather than hermeneutical. Abdullah (2020)⁵ focuses on the stagnation of taqlīd but does not develop a systematic interpretive framework with a focus on the Qur'ān. Haddou (2024)⁶ addresses Al-Alwani's methodology, though his analysis is descriptive and does not elaborate on its full epistemological structure. These studies show that, despite the widespread discussion of modern Qur'ānic hermeneutics, there is still a considerable gap in the methodological assessment of intra-Qur'ānic interpretation as an independent epistemological model, especially in the thought of Taha Jabir Al-Alwani (1935-2016). His principle of interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān has not been sufficiently examined as a systematic methodological framework that includes textual coherence and epistemological reconstruction.

Therefore, the research seeks to examine the hermeneutic approach of al-Alwani within the historical context of the development of Tafsīr, from the first oral interpretations to contemporary hermeneutical approaches. It explores how al-Alwani's Qur'ānic hermeneutic approach re-evaluates the traditional interpretations of the Qur'ān in terms of internal coherence and thematic unity. The method adopted for this research is a textual analysis of al-Alwani's main texts combined with a comparative analysis of classical tafsīr literature.

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to the area of Qur'ānic hermeneutics through investigating al-Alwani's methodology within the context of recent developments in the field of Tafsīr. The study discusses his model as an attempt to reform the relationship between the Qur'ānic text and its traditional modes of interpretation, highlighting coherence in both text and themes. Therefore, the study offers a critical assessment of his model in the context of the wider debate on the development of Qur'ānic methodologies of interpretation.

¹Taha Jabir al-Alwani, "Taqlid and the Stagnation of the Muslim Mind," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 8, no. 3 (1991), 513–524, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v8i3.2610>.

²Ismail Albayrak, "Modernity, Its Impact on Muslim World and General Characteristics of 19–20th-Century Revivalist–Reformists' Re-Reading of the Qur'an," *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): article 424, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050424>.

³Rifki Ahda Sumantri, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'ān Fazlur Rahman: Metode Tafsīr Double Movement" [Fazlur Rahman's Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Double-Movement Method of Tafsīr], *Komunika: Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi* 7, no. 1 (2013): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.24090/komunika.v7i1.364>.

⁴Said Fares Hassan, *Fiqh al-Aqallīyyāt: History, Development, and Progress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 14, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137350091>.

⁵Abdullah, "Taha Jabir Alwani - Taqlid and the Stagnation of the Muslim Mind," 2.

⁶Ezzaddin Bin Mohammed Haddou, "Methodology for Exploring the Quranic Meaning according to Taha Jabir al-Alwani (1935–2016)," *Nama Journal of Islamic Sciences and Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2024): 100–119, <https://doi.org/10.59151/v8i2.377>.

2. The Intellectual Legacy and Scholarly Contributions of Taha Jabir Al-Alwani

Taha Jabir Al-Alwani was one of the prominent scholars of modern Islamic jurisprudence who advocated the renewal within Islamic legal thought and promoted the re-evaluation of earlier opinions due to changing social, political and cultural realities. *Tajdīd*, which is considered to mean renewal, is at the center of all his scholarly work and it stresses the flexibility of Islamic law and its relevance to the current world. He was born in Iraq in 1935 and later moved to Egypt, where he completed his education at al-Azhar University. There he received his BA in 1959, MA in 1968 and PhD in 1973, all in the Islamic legal studies. Later in 1975, Taha Jabir Al-Alwani moved to Saudi Arabia where he became a lecturer at the Faculty of *Shari'ah*, Muhammad bin Saud University and a legal advisor to the Ministry of Interior.⁷ During this period he attended various international conferences, mostly arranged by Saudi organizations for Islamic engagement with the rest of the world.⁸

This was through involvement in various international activities where he came face-to-face with the various problems of the Muslim minority communities throughout the world. Through such engagements, he gained insight into the socio-religious problems facing the Muslim minority communities and began addressing issues of Islamic jurisprudence among the Muslim minorities. In 1977, Al-Alwani was part of those who helped establish the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT) based in Virginia. This organization was geared towards the renewal of Islamic intellectual tradition. After moving to America, he became the Director of its Research Department in 1983, which enhanced his scholarly reputation and influence especially within Western intellectual circles.⁹

Here he had the opportunity to engage critically with traditional Islamic thought and to further develop his reformist vision, especially in the fields of Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and issues pertaining to Muslim minorities in modern contexts.¹⁰ After arriving in the U.S. in 1983, he identified that Muslim minorities have distinct legal challenges that need a special jurisprudential approach. He observed that the existential and legal predicaments encountered in non-Muslim majority societies diverge jurisprudentially from Muslim-majority contexts, rendering conventional juridical decrees (*fatwās*) largely anachronistic and unmoored from the lived realities of minority communities.¹¹ This recognition led him to develop a jurisprudential framework specifically tailored to the conditions and lived realities of Muslim minorities. While staying in the US, he has been concerned about the issues that Muslims living in America face as far as law and religion are concerned and attempted to offer solutions in accordance with the Islamic laws. He also turned to some experts, including Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926-2022), and sought help of organizations such as Islamic Fiqh Council in Mecca for issuance of fatwa concerning the problems that Muslims in the Western world encounter.¹² Alwani was a founding member of the Muslim World League Council in Mecca and, from 1987, served on the Islamic Fiqh Academy of the OIC in Jeddah. He also led the

⁷Hassan, *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt*, 88.

⁸Emine Enise Yakar, and Sümeyra Yakar, "The Critical Analysis of Taha Jabir al-Alwani's Concept of Fiqh al Aqalliyāt," *Hitit İlahiyat Dergisi* 20, no. 1 (2021): 377–404, <https://doi.org/10.14395/hid.865002>.

⁹Hassan, *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt*, 89.

¹⁰Hassan, *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt*, 89.

¹¹Rizzal Rizqi Apriana et al., "Religious Education for Muslim Minorities from the Perspective of Taha Jabir al-Alwani," *Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2025): 152, <https://doi.org/10.30983/islamtransformatif.v9i2.10113>

¹²Taha Jabir Alwani, *Towards a Fiqh for Muslim Minorities: Some Basic Reflections*, trans. Ashur A. Shamis (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003), 7.

IIIT and contributed to establishing the Fiqh Council of North America in 1988.¹³ In Cairo, Alwani established the Zehra and Mona Rewaq libraries and research centers to support scholarly activity and intellectual exchange. He also supported the "Arab Women's Association for Civilizational Studies," founded by Mona Abou El-Fadl. Proficient in Arabic, English, Persian, and Turkish, he authored over thirty works in multiple languages.¹⁴

Taha Jabir Al-Alwani is seen as a key figure in the contemporary reform movement within Islam especially concerning Islamic jurisprudence and the fiqh of Muslim minorities. His education at al-Azhar, his practical experience in the Middle East region, and his academic activity in the United States contributed to the formation of a contextually driven approach to Islamic law. By engaging with the Muslim community of the West, he advocated a more flexible approach to the interpretation of Shari'ah due to changing social realities. The foundation of the IIIT and the Fiqh Council of North America can be viewed as his attempt to institutionalize intellectual reform. His intellectual efforts break the divide between abstraction and pragmatism by dealing with the issue of the intersection of legality and ethics of Muslims in non-Muslim societies.

One of his major contributions is the development of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, which entails the inductive exegetical approach to exegesis based on the Qur'ān itself. This methodology focuses on the coherence of the Qur'ān via inter-textual analysis, whereby the Qur'ānic verses explain each other. It gives precedence to the integrity of the Qur'ān as far as language, themes, and structure go rather than any external Qur'ānic materials like *riwāyāt* or legal interpretations.¹⁵ Taha Jabir Al-Alwani passed away on 4 March 2016 at the age of 81 while serving as president of Cordoba University.¹⁶ Considering the importance of his contributions to knowledge, his death was considered to be a great loss to the Muslim *ummah*. Just before his demise, al-Alwani had written a poem named "I am a Muslim" which expressed his faith in and dedication towards Islam. Such dedication was in line with his last turn to scholarship where he gave priority to the Qur'ān as the interpretative text.¹⁷ Alwani gives precedence to the Qur'ān as the major interpretive source by stressing the consistency and thematic cohesion in the text. The inductive approach of Alwani moves Qur'ānic interpretation from being based on sources outside the text to one which is text-oriented and involves hermeneutic reciprocity among the verses. In this way, he seeks to address the problem of interpretive fragmentation and develop an integrative interpretation of the Qur'ānic discourse.

The intellectual outlook of Taha Jabir Al-Alwani places emphasis on the construction of meaning based on profound reflection and methodological principles, without falling into simplistic or ambiguous interpretations. In his Qur'ānic exegesis, his aim was to liberate the discipline of Tafsīr from the excessive dependence on the classical interpretive literature of Islamic intellectual heritage in order to clarify the meaning of the text through a critical reconstitution of that same heritage.

¹³Hassan, *Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt*, 89.

¹⁴Adel Ahmed Ali Haidan, "Methodology of Dr. Taha Jaber al-Alwani in Dealing with the Holy Quran and Sunnah," *Journal of Al-Ma'ārif University College* 36, no. 2 (2025): 132–145, <https://doi.org/10.51345/v36i2.1081.g534>.

¹⁵Fateh Ouendjli, and Mustapha Madiani, "Renewal of the Interpretative Discourse in the Works of Taha Jabir al-Alwani through His Book *Interpretation of the Quran by the Quran*," *Psychology and Education* 62, no. 1 (2025): 235–260.

¹⁶Marina Munira, and Abdul Mutalib, "The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam: A Tribute to Taha Jabir al-Alwani," *Ulum Islamiyyah: The Malaysian Journal of Islamic Sciences* 20 (2017): 105–107, <https://doi.org/10.33102/uij.vol20no0.44>.

¹⁷Zainab Alwani, "I Am Muslim" (ResearchGate, 2016), DOI:[10.13140/RG.2.1.4804.3927](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4804.3927), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300078081_I_am_Muslim, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/67f2d221c7a0fc2fb03434be/t/68f905b89b3c8d25b9c189fb/1761150392904/IamMuslim.pdf>

Within this context, *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān* occupies a central place in Al-Alwani's understanding of the Qur'ān.¹⁸ He was particularly concerned about intertextuality and textual integrity, seeing the Qur'ān itself as the primary source of interpretation. As a student, Al-Alwani received an Islamic education, receiving instruction in Qur'ānic recitation and studying fiqh and *usūl al-fiqh* at Samarqandi madrasah in Kabul and al-Azhar University.¹⁹ During the last years of his life he increasingly concentrated on Qur'ānic studies, when he said: "It is necessary for me to return to the Noble Qur'ān before I reach a point at which my critical disposition no longer allows me to benefit from our intellectual heritage."²⁰ A similar shift is evident in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1150-1210) who, after setting aside other fields of study, devoted himself exclusively to *Qur'ānic* exegesis, motivated by strong internal intellectual and spiritual considerations.

Al-Alwani was noted to have been a strong advocate of Qur'ānic exegesis especially in the last years of his life.²¹ In recognizing the large corpus of exegetical works by the *mufasssīrīn* in different schools of interpretation and doctrines, he stressed the need to engage and appreciate the heritage from a critical perspective and within the right context. Additionally, he held that, where needed, researchers may need to go beyond the historical methods of interpretation to engage with the Qur'ānic text within their present context.²² Al-Alwani recognizes the timeless nature of the Qur'ān and the changing nature of its interpretation over time. He encourages scholars to engage in renewed interaction with the Qur'ānic text concerning its meaning, values, and objectives. In this regard, he calls for going beyond traditional exegetical methods by seeing the Qur'ān as having meanings that respond to changing human and civilizational conditions.²³ One must be spiritually purified and think deeply before grasping and benefiting from the meanings of the Qur'ān. Inner readiness is essential to be ready to comprehend the meanings of the text of the Qur'ān as those described in the verse: لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ - "Touched by none except the purified angels."²⁴ According to Al-Alwani, those are believers whose hearts have been purified through piety who can reflect more deeply on the Qur'ān. He emphasizes the need to go beyond the exegetical heritage by reflecting on the Qur'ān in historical, social and cultural contexts. This reduces the dependence on *asbāb al-nuzūl* and classical and later traditions of interpretation and encourages a more dynamic and contextualized understanding of the sacred text.

In Al-Alwani's view, the Qur'ān is the only cosmic source that provides a distinct epistemological and methodological system, offering solutions to the modern challenges. The unique qualities of the Qur'ān,²⁵ include its divine preservation from any change till the end of times, its completeness,²⁶ and finality of prophethood with the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). Based on this, he asserts that the Qur'ān provides guidance and explanation concerning all matters,

¹⁸Abdullah, "Taha Jabir Alwani - Taqlid and the Stagnation of the Muslim Mind," 8.

¹⁹Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, *Afala Yatadabbaruna al-Qur'an: Ma'alim Manhaj fi al-Tadabbur wa al-Tatbir* (Cairo: Dar al-Salam for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 2010), 5.

²⁰Taha Jabir Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān* [Interpreting the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān], 2nd ed. (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2020), 6.

²¹Ammar Ahmad Al-Hariri, "The Uṣūlī Construction of the Sunnah from Problematization to Integration: An Analytical Study of the Thought of Taha Jabir al-Alwani," *Al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Mu'āṣir* 31, no. 109 (2025): 167–199, <https://doi.org/10.35632/citj.v31i109.13849>.

²²Fathi Hasan Malkawi, "Features of Taha Jabir al-Alwani's Intellectual Renewal (Tajdīd)," *Al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Mu'āṣir* 31, no. 109 (2025): 28, <https://doi.org/10.35632/citj.v31i109.13839>.

²³Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 5.

²⁴Al-Wāqī'ah, 56:79.

²⁵Al-Hijr, 15:9; al-Qiyāmah, 75:17–19; Fuṣṣilat, 41:41–42; al-A'lā, 87:6; Tā-Hā, 20:114; al-An'ām, 6:115; al-Hāqqah, 69:44–47; Yūnus, 10:15.

²⁶Al-Wāqī'ah, 56:78; al-An'ām, 6:115.

Islam is considered a universal message that is not restricted to any particular time, place or society. On the other hand, he holds that the full meaning of the Qur'ānic text can never be fully grasped by human understanding nor restricted to a single interpretation since this would undermine the nature of the Qur'ānic text, which is absolute and eternal.²⁷ Therefore, he advocates for a new interpretive approach to tackle the present-day challenges and uphold the universality of the Qur'ānic text and prevent its reduction to the historical or cultural contexts.²⁸ For al-Alwani, the Qur'ānic text is the highest source of guidance and knowledge above all historical and cultural considerations.

In the preface, Al-Alwani outlines his exegetical methodology, stating: "Our method in interpreting the Qur'ān is based on deep reflection *tadabbur* (deep reflection) and interpreting certain parts of the Qur'ān through other parts. In other words, we explain ambiguous or general verses by referring to clearer or more detailed ones. The Noble Qur'ān opens itself -or remains closed- depending on the spiritual readiness of the individual, their inclination toward the text, and the purity of their faculties of consciousness."²⁹ Al-Alwani describes his interpretative method through *tadabbur* and the interpretation of the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān. According to al-Alwani, the process of interpretive reflection rather than literal interpretation is essential in which the unclear or general verses need to be explicated through clearer verses of the Qur'ān.³⁰ This minimizes reliance on external sources and historical context. He also says that the comprehension of the Qur'ān depends on the spiritual preparedness, sincerity, and intellectual and moral purity of the reader, through which the Qur'ānic text becomes, "open," or "closed." In this way, the act of interpretation becomes a dialogic process during which the semantic limits of the Qur'ānic discourse are revealed in accordance with the clarity of mind and morals of the interpreter. *Tadabbur*, as formulated by Al-Alwani, is a methodological reconsideration within the domain of Qur'ānic interpretation. It does not replace the traditional Tafsīr methodology but provides an integrative and reflective approach through which the Qur'ān is interpreted through itself as a coherent text. While Tafsīr *Mawḍu'i* involves the thematic and contextual arrangement of verses, *tadabbur* goes further by incorporating the text's purpose and ethical orientation.³¹ In this way, *tadabbur* is a comprehensive methodology of Qur'ānic interpretation and maintains the Qur'ān's relevance in the contemporary world and scholarly discussion. It highlights its fundamental importance in human intellectual development and civilizational responsibility. Such responsibility includes societal development as well as the creation of a conscious *ummah*. Without *tadabbur*, creativity and innovation cannot fully develop and civilization cannot advance.

The Qur'ān encourages *tadabbur* through its text. It is when the reader engages in *tadabbur* that the Qur'ānic text is seen to transform individuals into knowledgeable and reform-minded members of the *ummah* as mentioned in the following verse: - الَّذِينَ يَرْتُونَ الْآفْرَدُونَ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ "Those are the inheritors who will inherit Firdaus (Paradise)." They will abide therein eternally.³² In this way, *tadabbur* acts as a means of individual and collective revival.³³

²⁷Hatice Kübra İmamoğlu, and Tuğba Öztürk, "The Place of Collective Ijtihad in Taha Jaber al-Alwani's Understanding of Usul," in *Thematic Kalam Meetings: Problems and Interpretations in Religious Thought*, ed. Şaban Ali Düzgün and Tuğba Günel (Istanbul: Endülüs Publications, 2016), 237.

²⁸Haddou, "Methodology for Exploring the Quranic Meaning", 112.

²⁹Al-Alwani, *Afala yatadabbaruna al-Qur'an*, 6.

³⁰N. Gafoordeen, and M. M. M. Sabir, "Thaha Jabir al-Alwani and Yusuf al-Qardlawi: Founders of Minority Fiqh (Fiqh al-Aqalliyat)," *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation* 10, no. 4 (2023): 70–82, <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSL.2023.10410>.

³¹Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 44-45.

³²Al-Mu'minūn, 23:11.

³³Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 13-14.

Al-Alwani maintained that many limitations in Qur'ānic interpretation result from neglecting *tadabbur*, particularly in relation to external sciences. He regarded *tadabbur* as a key instrument for renewing the intellectual life of the *ummāh*, often citing *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* as an example of the Qur'ān's guidance for both spiritual and social order through reflection. Moreover, he held that *tadabbur*, like intellect and the sciences, is not limited to any specific field and rather serves as a guiding principle in the pursuit of knowledge.³⁴ Spiritual sciences should be emphasized in education and intellect as they are important sources through which individuals can acquire knowledge and improve their lives. In this way, progress depends on effort towards knowledge and *tadabbur* and decline of intellect occurs when they are neglected.³⁵

The author argues that *tadabbur* is an important component of textual understanding especially in relation to divine revelation.³⁶ *Tadabbur* is one of the major means that helps in understanding the true intention behind the revelation and preserve the connection to its original meaning especially in disciplines such as fiqh where there is a need for fidelity to sources. Besides being just an intellectual act, *tadabbur* can be understood as a transformative practice that preserves meaning while considering the divine intent hence ensuring continuity of interpretive understanding.³⁷ Furthermore, the author points out that *tadabbur* is also crucial in interpreting the meaning of the Qur'ān and helping one access its semantic and spiritual meaning. However, according to the author, the Qur'ān can be misinterpreted by those with non-sincere intentions; in contrast, for the believers it can serve as a source of healing and mercy. As it is mentioned in the Qur'ān: *وَنُزِّلَ مِنَ الْفُرْقَانِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَرْيَدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا* - "We send down the Qur'ān as a healing and mercy for the believers, but it only increases the wrongdoers in loss."³⁸ *Tadabbur* brings together linguistic interpretation and the purposes of revelation.³⁹

2.1. Principles of Interpreting the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān via *Tadabbur*

Al-Alwani identifies three main obstacles to proper Qur'ānic understanding, particularly emphasizing divergence among readers and interpreters. He argues that *tadabbur* is not applied uniformly, resulting in varying interpretations and meanings across individuals and historical contexts.⁴⁰ According to Al-Alwani, interpretive divergence, especially under psychological or spiritual tension, requires restraint and postponement of Qur'ānic interpretation to avoid subjective readings.⁴¹ He cautions that the result will be selective interpretation of the Qur'ān to support conflicting interpretations. This, in turn, is likely to produce interpretive contradictions. Rather than such a contradictory reading, he suggests a holistic understanding of the Qur'ān to maintain its coherence and unity.

Al-Alwani sees the second barrier to sound understanding of the Qur'ānic texts as the reader's approach to the text with the aim of seeking evidence for already existing positions and opinions, thus, using the Qur'ān to justify existing opinions. The third barrier to right understanding is the pre-existing bias, which obstructs understanding of the divine text and distorts its meaning in such a way that subjective meanings are imposed on it. In Al-Alwani's view, the Qur'ān is open to "the reader who is in need of it, who desires to listen to it and seek counsel from it in order to benefit from its

³⁴Haddou, "Methodology for Exploring the Quranic Meaning", 110.

³⁵Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 194-195.

³⁶Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 87.

³⁷Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 11-12.

³⁸Al-Isrā', 17:82

³⁹Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 76.

⁴⁰Haddou, "Methodology for Exploring the Quranic Meaning," 112.

⁴¹Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 32.

guidance and meanings.”⁴² This sincere desire to receive divine guidance is what enables the person to establish the right relationship with the holy text. And as Allah, the Exalted says: - وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ - “Did He not find you unguided then guided you?”⁴³ Thus, divine guidance can only be bestowed upon the person approaching the Qur’ān with reverence and need, whereas those trying to use it to justify their opinions may misunderstand it.⁴⁴

2.2. Interpreting the Qur’ān through the Qur’ān: A *Tadabbur*-Based Approach with Practical Examples

Al-Alwani presents his interpretive method in the book *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi’l-Qur’ān* (970 pages), which is a selective Qur’ānic commentary of *surahs* instead of a complete linear exegesis. Its structure differs from that of traditional Tafsīrs. Although the commentary begins with Surah al-Fātihah, it departs from the canonical order immediately thereafter, moving to non-contiguous surahs such as al-An’ām and Tāhā, and continuing until al-Sajdah, where the commentary ends.⁴⁵ As can be seen, al-Alwani does not abide by the traditional order of the mushāf nor does he arrange them thematically. He employs the *nujūm* paradigm of revelation. Under this method the *surahs* will be grouped by their chronological periods of revelation in order to strengthen interpretive coherence through the focus on thematic unity of the Qur’ānic passages.⁴⁶ In his interpretation of al-Fātihah, Al-Alwani starts from an introduction termed an “identification card” of the surah. The “card” describes the key characteristics of this surah, namely the number of verses, words, and letters, the nature of revelation (Meccan/Medinan), its position in the *mushāf*, its virtues as reported in prophetic traditions, and the meaning of the name of the surah in relation to its content and purpose.

Al-Alwani draws attention to the relationship between *Surahs* of the Qur’ān and points out that the al-Fātihah cannot be understood in isolation from others. Al-Alwani holds that this surah should not be interpreted apart from the context of the Qur’ān as a whole, in which every surah constitutes a part of the theological message.⁴⁷ The relationship between the *surahs* also adds to their internal consistency and coherence. *Surah* al-Nās is the last surah in the *mushāf*, which calls upon people to take refuge in Allah as the Lord and Sovereign of mankind. Given these attributes, *Surah* al-Fātihah rightly starts with praising Allah. In this way, moving from the search for protection in al-Nas to devotion and praise in al-Fātihah becomes a logical and meaningful development. As indicated by the traditional commentator al-Biqā’ī in his *Naẓm al-Durar*,⁴⁸ the purpose of placing *Surah* al-Falaq and *Surah* al-Nās before al-Fātihah is preparation. Both these *surahs* focus on seeking protection from evil and serve as a means of spiritual purification and orientation. The reader abandons envy, malice, and any evil behind him and turns to the All-merciful and All-powerful Protector, becoming ready to engage with divine guidance. This is essential for prayers and understanding of the message of the holy Qur’ān.⁴⁹ *Surah* al-Baqarah builds on the theological and spiritual teachings in al-Fātihah. While al-Fātihah emphasizes worship of God alone and categorizes groups of people, *Surah* al-Baqarah (1-20) gives detailed descriptions of the believers, disbelievers, and hypocrites. In this way, continuity in structure, concepts, and teachings highlights the unified nature of the message of the

⁴²Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi’l-Qur’ān*, 31.

⁴³Ad-Duhā, 93:7.

⁴⁴Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi’l-Qur’ān*, 32.

⁴⁵Haidan, “Methodology of Dr. Taha Jaber Al-Alwani,” 133.

⁴⁶Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi’l-Qur’ān*, 32.

⁴⁷Al-Nās, 114.

⁴⁸Al-Biqā’ī, Burhān al-Dīn, *Elevating Reflection through Examining the Objectives of the Qur’anic Chapters* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma’ārif, 1987), 1:22.

⁴⁹Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi’l-Qur’ān*, 31.

Qur'ān.⁵⁰

Moreover, the author mentions the thematic connection between Surat al-Fātihah and the surahs that follow it, noting that this harmony and consistency are essential in order to fully understand the message of the whole Qur'ān. He employs the *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān* method in which verses are interpreted through other Qur'ānic verses without first referring to hadith or classical Tafsīr literature. This method highlights the internal unity of the Qur'ān.⁵¹ Within this exegetical framework the author identifies five fundamental principles of al-Fātihah's interpretation:

2.2.1. *Tawhīd* (Oneness of God)

Surat al-Fātihah encompasses all dimensions of *Tawhīd*, including *Tawhīd al-Rububiyyah* (affirmation of Allah as Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign), *Tawhīd al-Uluhiyyah* (worship of Allah alone), *Tawhīd al-Asma wa al-Sifat* (oneness of Allah's names and attributes), and *Tawhīd al-Hakimiyyah* (recognition of Allah as the ultimate source of judgment and authority).

2.2.2. *Tazkiyah* (Self-purification)

This surah encourages believers to purify themselves morally and spiritually through sincere worship, dependence on Allah, and seeking guidance

2.2.3. *Umrān* (Civilizational Development)

This surah promotes leading a balanced life based on faith, knowledge, and actions, thus contributing to civilizational development.

2.2.4. *Al-Ummah* (Community Formation)

This surah presents the idea of a unified community of believers being guided by the straight path, seeking guidance collectively as well as individually.

2.2.5. *Al-Da'wah* (Call to Guidance)

With the phrase "Guide us to the Straight Path," the *surah* indicates individual need for guidance as well as the call to guide others.⁵²

Following the formulation of the methodological framework, al-Alwani presents the main conceptual structure of *Surah al-Fātihah*, which consist of the following twelve concepts: the *Basmalah* (In the name of Allah), *al-Hamd* (praise), *Rububiyyah* (Lordship), divine mercy, Mālik/Malik (Owner/King), Din (judgment/religion), *Ibadah* (worship), *Isti'annah* (seeking assistance), *Huda* (guidance), *Sirat al-Mustakim* (the Straight Path), *Ni'mah* (divine blessing), and the classification of humankind and its specific qualities.⁵³ Al-Alwani analyses the meanings of these concepts as they appear in different passages of the Qur'ān, thus examining their semantic role in the broader Qur'ānic discourse. He explains the meaning of these concepts in a Qur'ān-centered way, regarding the Qur'ān as the basis for conceptual interpretation, and then elaborate on them keeping their coherence within the unity of the Qur'ānic message.⁵⁴ Having completed his analysis of the surah, al-Alwani ends his commentary on the surah by reflecting on its principal "stars," i.e., its main

⁵⁰Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 32.

⁵¹Zafer Ahmad Ganai and Nasir Nabi, "Evaluating the Sunnah through the Qur'anic Criterion: A Critical Analysis of Taha Jabir al-Alwani's Methodology," *Journal of Modern Islamic Studies and Civilization* 4, no. 1 (2026): 92–109, <https://doi.org/10.59653/jmisc.v4i01.2127>.

⁵²Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 50.

⁵³Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 51.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

thematic points and interpretations, and then proceeds-according to the methodology of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*-to his commentary on Surah al-Baqarah.

In his commentary on the chapter of al-Fātihah, Al-Alwani states that the chapter presents a basic classification of humanity. The distinguishing feature of this classification is the fact that it does not depend on involuntary conditions. Instead, the classification relies on people's actions on their relationship to divine guidance. The commentator maintains that such a classification presents an objective model reflecting divine justice and closely connected to human responsibility. Therefore, in order for one to be responsible for one's actions and deeds, there must be a moral classification which is built only based on conscious agency and ethical behaviour. Thus, matters beyond human control have no consequences in this life or hereafter at all. It is only actions that are done voluntarily and consciously that should be evaluated, judged, rewarded or punished.⁵⁵

From the above discussion, we may say that faith does not depend on identity or lineage of a person, but rather it comes through a conscious process of knowing God, affirming His oneness (*Tawhīd*), recognizing His attributes and rejecting any imperfections attributed to Him. This awareness leads the believer to translate belief into deliberate action, activating human faculties in accordance with divine guidance. As an example of this, al-Alwani highlights that in *Sūrah al-Fātihah*, humanity is divided into three essential categories based on their stance toward the truth: (1) those whom God has blessed -the rightly guided; (2) those upon whom is God's anger – those who recognized the truth but rejected it; and (3) those who have gone astray – due to ignorance or deviation. This classification is free from any subjective or external bias and is grounded in human volition and action, making it just objective, and consistent. This principle is also supported by numerous Qur'ānic verses. For instance, the Almighty says: *إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَءَاتَاهُمْ* – “It is certainly We Who resurrect the dead and write what they send forth and what they leave behind. Everything is listed by Us in a perfect Record.”⁵⁶ and: *وَنُضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ* – “We set up the scales of justice for the Day of Judgment, so no soul will be wronged in the least.”⁵⁷ These verses affirm that it is the voluntary and conscious actions that are to be “weighed” and evaluated, determining one's ultimate fate. Consequently, the classification of individuals based on their deeds -rather than on external, uncontrollable factors-represents the most accurate and just way to understand human accountability and divine reward. Depending on the human being's stance and actions toward the Almighty, he or she either receives divine grace and reward in Paradise or faces rightful punishment.⁵⁸

In examining Taha Jabir al-Alwani's methodology of *Tafsīr*, it becomes clear that the methodology goes beyond common approaches to *Tafsīr* that examine exegetical structures. While the typical approaches to *Tafsīr* usually concentrate on detailing interpretive processes, his scholarly tools and exegetical stance, modern frameworks analyze epistemic foundations. In turn, his methodology is grounded in this tradition and provides the possibility to work with the ideas and rules underlying the exegetical practice. Unlike other methodologies that tend to ignore the past approaches, the methodology of Taha Jabir al-Alwani highlights the natural evolution of the exegetical tradition by modifying the classical hermeneutic instruments for solving the new epistemological challenges that have emerged in the contemporary era. These include issues such as the formation of the interpretive content, the process of making critical judgments, and the substantiation of the position of the exegete. Detailed analysis indicates that al-Alwani's interpretive procedures in *Surah al-Fātihah* are different from those used in his interpretation of other *surahs*. Nevertheless, the basic principles remain the same, the objectives are comprehensive, and the

⁵⁵Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 56.

⁵⁶Yā-Sīn, 36:12.

⁵⁷Al-Anbiyā', 21:47.

⁵⁸Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 56.

interpretive vision remains unified.

Comparing the methodologies of Taha Jabir al-Alwani and Fazlur Rahman in interpreting the Qur'ān, it becomes evident that these scholars suggest different but complementary models of interpretations. Thus, Fazlur Rahman developed the, "Double Movement" model that moves from the present reality to the historical context of revelation and back to the present in order to respond to modern needs by discovering general moral and ethical principles. The epistemological methodology of Rahman implies the combination of the text with its historical context, emphasizing the importance of relating revelation to contemporary realities.⁵⁹

Al-Alwani, however, suggests an approach that involves the use of the structural coherence of the Qur'ān and the concept of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān* for interpreting the meaning of the Qur'ānic text. This means that the meaning of the Qur'ānic text is derived through inductive interpretation of the Qur'ān without appealing to the external sources or the historical background of its revelation.⁶⁰ One of the important components of this methodology of interpretation is the concept of *tadabbur* that implies a careful, thoughtful, and systematic consideration of the text with the goal of enhancing the process of interpretation. While Rahman focuses on the historical and moral aspects of the text, al-Alwani highlights the spiritual, civilizational, and epistemological aspects of the text.⁶¹ Thus, the role of the interpreter is not only related to the process of interpretation but also includes the revival of Islamic civilization and epistemology. In this way, the two scholars offer different interpretive models: Rahman offers a model oriented toward history and morals, while al-Alwani offers a structural and reflective method.

3. Findings

Findings from the study underscore the significance of Taha Jabir al-Alwani's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān* as a hermeneutic and epistemological contribution within the field of Qur'ānic studies. The methodology he follows in his hermeneutical endeavor emphasizes textual cohesion and semantic unity of the Qur'ānic text while favoring the meanings derived from the Qur'ān over those obtained from other interpretive sources. In this case, *tadabbur* becomes a hermeneutic and an epistemic tool for understanding the revelation. The study notes that there are three main barriers to Qur'ānic understanding within the framework of al-Alwani's hermeneutics: interpretive disagreements rooted in spiritual tensions, the quest for validating preconceptions, and interpretive subjectivism. In order to overcome these barriers, al-Alwani proposes a reflective and Qur'ān-centered interpretation. Another notable feature of his hermeneutical model is the method of *nujūm* that interprets the revelation based on its stages, rather than only through the canonical order of the muṣḥāf, which emphasizes the thematic and organic unity of revelation.

In addition, the above-mentioned research shows that al-Alwani builds his interpretation around the concepts of *tawḥīd*, *tazkiyah*, *umrān*, *ummah*, and *da'wah* as essential principles of interpretation. Through inter-textual analysis, he intends to show the coherence of the message of the Qur'ān and to restore its ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions. The classification of individuals provided by him into guided, misguided, and those who incur Divine wrath is based mostly on moral responsibility rather than on their identity. Overall, this methodology represents a reformist contribution to contemporary Islamic thought. Despite the incomplete nature of his *Tafsīr* and the methodological challenges posed by the *nujūm* approach for traditional exegetical models, his work remains a significant contribution to the renewal of Qur'ānic hermeneutics and contemporary Islamic studies.

⁵⁹Sumantri, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Fazlur Rahman, 13.

⁶⁰Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 6.

⁶¹Al-Alwani, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, 44.

4. Conclusion

Al-Alwani's Qur'ānic methodology, as articulated in his book *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi'l-Qur'ān*, rests on three pillars: *tadabbur* (deep reflection), inner purification, and the coherence of the Qur'ān. The process of interpretation proposed by him requires deriving meanings from the Qur'ān itself and through active and conscious engagement in order to achieve it. The purpose of this approach is to place the Qur'ān at the center of modern scholarship and to develop a hermeneutic approach based on the thematic and semantic coherence of the Qur'ānic text. However, despite critical evaluation of earlier exegetical traditions, he does not disregard their importance as scholarly achievements. Each new generation should engage with intellectual and spiritual aspects of the Qur'ān in relation to new conditions. Although his Tafsīr is incomplete, his methodology makes an important reform-oriented contribution to contemporary Qur'ānic studies by integrating textual fidelity, reflective interpretation, and contextual relevance.

Author Contribution

Valmire Batatina Krasniqi: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing - original draft, writing - review & editing, project administration. **Lulzim Esati:** supervision. **Selver Krasniqi:** writing - review & editing, resources.

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